

## SUPERCARGOES IN NEW GUINEA

By H. SCHMIDT AND S. LOHMANN

*The war is constantly catapulting new geographical areas into the consciousness of newspaper readers. Truly deserving the name "World War," the present conflict is reaching into regions hitherto known only to a few planters and traders, explorers or missionaries.*

*During the last few days the Japanese forces have occupied Rabaul, until recently the capital of the Territory of New Guinea, and the Australian Government has announced the evacuation of Lae, the new capital, and of Madang.*

*New Guinea was discovered by the white man early in the sixteenth century and named after Guinea in West Africa which, the first explorers thought, it resembled. For a long time a bone of contention between the Dutch and the English East India Companies, it finally became the colonial possession of three European powers, Holland (the western half), Germany (the northern section of the eastern half—called Kaiser Wilhelm Land—with the Bismarck Archipelago and Rabaul as capital), and Great Britain, or rather Australia (the southern portion of the eastern half, called Territory of Papua). After the Great War the German colony became a mandate of Australia and the main islands were renamed New Britain (with Rabaul) and New Ireland. In April 1921 all Germans were deported. In the words of the latest edition of the excellent "Pacific Islands Year-Book" (Sydney, 1939, p. 267): "The Germans lost everything, but they never whimpered."*

*Our two authors have known New Guinea for years as supercargoes of Melchers & Co., a firm with headquarters in Shanghai and branches from Kansu to the Solomon Islands.*

*To follow their story please consult our map on page 152.—K.M.*

### DAWN

"Five minutes next port!" the quartermaster called out at four o'clock one morning, off the east coast of New Guinea. A pinnace with a string of five whaleboats had already been lowered down the side of our thousand-ton tub of a freighter and was waiting for us in the darkness. We scrambled down the rope ladder and, with a loud bang, the heavy Diesel engine started. The sea was calm, the full moon was shining, and in the far distance the coast showed faintly as a dark shadow, not far from the white line of surf where the sea was breaking on the coral reef, gleaming fantastically in the light of the moon. Behind us our pinnace left a trail of phosphorescence, sparkling as brightly as the Southern Cross.

The plantation we were heading for was too small to warrant the freighter

calling there, so we had to go with the whaleboats to collect a few tons of copra while the freighter headed for the next port of call, a mission station.

Towards dawn hundreds of porpoises played in front of and alongside our boats. The light green of the straight lines of coconut palms along a strip of the shore could now be distinguished from the sinister darkness of the tropical bush which pressed in on the plantation from all sides and rose in the background to the cloud-capped mountains of the interior. The first rays of the sun shot above the horizon as we chugged through the crystal-clear water over the coral reef.

### "SAILO, SAILO"

The day's routine began. The planter was waiting for us on the beach.

We had to jump into the water and wade the last few yards. The copra, already packed, was quickly loaded into the boats by black Kanakas. They were of fine stature, clad only in a red *lap lap*, some with bright hibiscus flowers in their woolly hair.

By eight o'clock our job was finished. Our pinnace pulled the heavily laden cargo boats and followed the coast, which was densely planted with coconut palms. The sun began to blaze down on us. The planter seemed to enjoy the opportunity of traveling with us to the nearest mission station, hardly large enough to be called a village. On these lonely plantations, where for weeks on end most of the planters see no one but their native workers, it is a welcome diversion to have visitors. One can readily understand the feeling of excitement that comes over the planter when, early in the morning, his *koon*s (pidgin for Kanakas) herald the approach of a ship with their chant of "sailo, sailo, one fellow sailo he come up." It means not only business for him but newspapers for a whole month, the mail, an opportunity to talk something other than pidgin for a whole day, and—an ice-cooled drink or two.

As all planters do now, he complained. A planter's life was not easy. In the beginning of New Guinea's colonial history, land could be bought for almost nothing, for the Kanakas were glad to get tobacco or tools for it without realizing the value involved in this barter. The first settlers cleared the bush and laid out their plantations in the years 1880 to 1900. While waiting for the trees to grow to maturity they paid their expenses by hunting birds of paradise, which, as a result, have now almost been exterminated in the regions near the coast. In the end the government prohibited the export of these feathers. At the same time the demand was also greatly reduced, since fashion no longer required women to wear these beautiful feathers on their hats. These easy times are now a thing of the past.

### COPRA'S UPS AND DOWNS

Today most of the plantations belong to one or the other of the two big Australian concerns with head offices in Sydney and branch offices all over the territory, who, with their own fleet of small freighters, maintain a service from Rabaul to their scattered possessions. However, there are still a number of independent plantations, mostly owned by Australian veterans of the Great War to whom they were leased under a government scheme during the years 1920-22. A few have been able to make something out of this opportunity. At a time when copra fetched £30 to £40 a ton and brought a profit of almost £20, they repaid their loans and made the plantations their own. But most of them were not suited to the peculiarities of a planter's life, which, apart from hard physical labor, requires a certain knack in dealing with the natives. They very soon got themselves heavily into debt with the "two big ones" (W. R. Carpenter & Co. and Burns, Philp & Co., nicknamed after their initials "We Rob Christ" and "Bloody Pirates.") They were then faced, as was our planter, with the choice of continuing to run their places themselves and delivering their products to their creditors at fixed prices usually below market value, or of selling their plantations outright.

Until the thirties coconut oil, extracted from copra in Europe and America, fetched quite handsome prices. As most of the fledgling plantation owners had taken on the job with a view to making money quickly enough to enable them to return to civilization in Australia before the tropical climate got them, no particular efforts were made to develop anything but coconut plantations on a big scale. This proved disastrous to the small individual plantations when, during the years before the outbreak of the present war, competition by the cheaper whale, cottonseed, and soya oil forced copra prices down to a level which barely paid plantation expenses, let alone interest on loans and mortgages.

Market Quotations for Hot-Air Dried Copra,  
per ton cif London (from the *Pacific Island*  
*Monthly*, April 1941)

January	1932	£14.15.0
"	1933	13.12.6
"	1934	8. 7.6
"	1935	10. 5.0
"	1936	14. 0.0
"	1937	23.12.6
"	1938	13.12.6
"	1939	10.10.0
"	1940	13. 5.0
April	1940	12.17.6

Only then did planters realize how dangerous it had been to rely solely on their copra production, and experiments were begun particularly with coffee, cocoa, and kapok. For the cultivation of these products the climate proved beneficial, and the low intelligence of the native labor was sufficient. While a coconut palm needs about seven years to grow to maturity, it takes a like number of years before cocoa or coffee yield any substantial crop. It therefore takes quite some time before worth-while production in these fields can be expected.

#### KANAKAS AND CANNIBALS

The backwardness of the natives, our planter claimed, is the chief handicap in the development of these vast, as yet barely touched territories with their rich volcanic soil and comparatively favorable climate. The natives of the Mandate of New Guinea (consisting of the northeastern part of the island of New Guinea, the islands of New Britain, New Ireland, Bougainville, and the Admiralty Islands), as well as of Papua and the British Solomon Islands belong to the Melanesian race. This race is related to the aborigines of Australia and, like them, has in its civilization not progressed beyond the Stone Age. Native labor can therefore only be utilized for the roughest of manual work on the plantations, in the gold fields, on board the coastal vessels, etc. Positions such as overseer on a big plantation or clerk in an office or store have to be given to Chinese, Malaysians, or half-castes, as very few Kanakas can be taught to read and write. As far as her native population is concerned, New Guinea cannot

compare with the South Sea islands to the east of her, such as Samoa, Hawaii etc., with their beautiful Polynesian races; nor can she compare with her western neighbors in the Dutch East Indies with their ancient cultures.

Vast parts of the territory are still unexplored, particularly the mountainous interior of New Guinea proper, which, with its 312,000 square miles, is the second largest island in the world after Greenland and nearly three times the size of the Philippines. Estimates of the native population are more or less guesswork and vary between one and five millions. The natives are split up into innumerable small tribes of a few hundred souls each, with all shades of colors from chocolate brown to ebony black. Nearly every tribe has a distinct dialect all its own. It can happen that tribes only twenty or thirty miles apart may not be able to understand one another.

In Papua the government has tried to introduce one of the local native dialects as the official language in communications with the natives. Everywhere else pidgin English has become the universal tongue, even among the *koon*s themselves if they happen to belong to different tribes. This pidgin is composed, apart from English, of smatterings of German, Malayan, Chinese, and native words. It has developed almost into a language in itself, and is taught as such to the natives at the mission schools. The missions have even developed a proper grammar, dictionary, etc. for it.

Going ashore again at Rabaul after one of the monthly trips through the islands, we would say, for example: "Me fellow raus 'em ship. Me fellow go Kong Kong. 'Em he cut 'em grass belong top belong me." This means that we would leave the ship to go to the Chinese barber to have a haircut.

The territory is zoologically surprisingly bare and there are not even any monkeys. It is to the lack of game that some scientists attribute the practice of cannibalism as it undoubtedly used to flourish in New Guinea,



particularly in the inland regions away from the sea and its abundance of fish. Even nowadays, although the government is taking strong measures against it, cases of cannibalism have sometimes been reported from some of the more remote parts.

#### OF CHINESE AND SHARK FINS

Our planter complained bitterly about being no longer allowed to engage Chinese labor as he had been able to do under the German administration before the Great War. (Only in Papua has the immigration of Oriental races always been prohibited.) The Australian administration stopped this in order to check the further influx of Asiatics. Chinese laborers, brought in on contract from Asia, had proved very reliable, and many improvements on the plantations could be carried out with them which now remained neglected. The planter would have counted himself happy to have just one Chinese as a foreman, who could also assist him in his small trade store (carried on at every plantation) and thus increase his trade, or help him to go out fishing *bêche-de-mer*. This is a sea cucumber, or trepang, sold at very high prices to China, where it serves to flavor many a Cantonese dish and is much sought after as a delicacy. But in order to obtain the full price it has to be cleaned and dried very carefully. As a rule the greater part of a good catch is lost by being improperly cured, merely because of the aggravating fact that the natives cannot be trained to take the proper care of it.

Many of these formerly indentured Chinese remained in the country after the expiration of their contracts and started businesses of their own as small traders, carpenters, craftsmen, and even plantation owners. Due to their modest way of living, keen business instinct, and dogged perseverance they soon prospered, and even now represent a very strong element. Some of them today are among the wealthiest citizens of New Guinea, being the biggest exporters of ivory nut, trepang, trocas shell, shark fins, croco-

dile skins, and other products collected and sold to them by the natives.

Although no further Asiatics were permitted to enter the country under the new immigration laws, Chinese influence remains very strong, as the old families are now "residents" and their generally numerous offspring have to be granted the same rights. We have here the same problem of overseas Chinese that is found in the Straits and the Malay States. The streets of Chinatown at Rabaul or Madang are filled with the restless activities of the Sons of Han.

While we were still talking about the Chinese question a mighty schooner passed us, showing the house flag of Ah Tam, the largest Chinese hong at Rabaul, heavily laden with copra from one of its own large plantations. The white ship stood out splendidly against the deep blue sea under the bright sun.

#### PLANTERS AND PADRES

All along the coast one copra plantation followed another. They all looked alike, with their high trees planted in straight rows, each tree thirty feet from the next, on the narrow strip of flat land between the sea and the mountains. Separating them were small plots of virgin forest consisting mainly of softwood. Here and there huge callafillum and other trees towered above the jungle, indicating valuable timber. Owing to the high cost of transportation, however, it has been impossible to export these fine-grained timbers in competition with other wood-exporting countries. But if one day our poor world should be able to afford more luxuries, these trees might be brought to Europe and America for use in furniture or paneling.

By the time we reached the freighter anchored off the mission station it was almost noon. We were all relieved to get off the sun-baked pinnacle and back on board, but the happiest of all was our planter. The first thing he did was to call for a cold beer, a treat he had long gone without on his lonely plantation. He even forgot his grudge against the missionaries and good-

humoredly joined the company of some padres who stayed on board for lunch. Like all the other planters, traders, and miners, he maintained that the missions, with the aid of the labor of unpaid native converts, constitute an unfair competition, and are ruining the native trade by giving away presents of trade goods to any native who shows willingness to be converted. There was much in what the planter said. The missions, because of their larger output, are also often able to have larger and better technical equipment, especially drying kilns, and in this way save expenses.

### HANDLING THE NUTS

The work itself is similar on all plantations. The ripe nuts fallen off the trees are collected, the hard outer husk is split with an axe, and the soft inner flesh then cut into small slices with long knives. Most of this work is done by natives in a squatting position, with the nut held between the feet. Immediately after slicing, the pulp is sent into the drying chamber, which is heated either by pipes or an open fire. "Smoked copra," the finished product of the latter process, is about ten shillings to £1 per ton lower in price than the "hot-air" or "sun-dried" quality. The two latter are equal in quality, but sun-dried copra requires a great deal of attention during the drying process in the open air in order to avoid damage by sudden showers of rain. Hence most planters now produce only hot-air copra. All work is done in shelters open on all sides. Incidentally, if a bag falls into the sea while being loaded, the copra can be easily re-dried without any harm to its quality, whereas copra dampened by rain spoils immediately. Smoked copra is used mainly in Marseilles for the manufacture of the famous French soaps. Hot-air and sun-dried copra is shipped to Europe as well as to the United States to be turned into margarine and other edible fats.

The mission where we stayed also maintains a large timber mill. Here all the wood for the various stations in the interior is sawn, furniture is

made, and large quantities of timber cut in even lengths are sold to the planters. The mission runs efficient workshops of all kinds, from shoemaking and tailoring to carpenter and machine repair shops, forges, slipways, and airplane hangars. Each is under the supervision of lay brothers who were experts in their particular trade before they joined the Society.

The proceeds of these side lines go a long way towards supporting the mission work, which is not limited to spreading the Gospel but includes educating the native population. Elementary schools have been established by most missions, which also have small printing plants of their own for the printing of all their schoolbooks. Even the Bible is published in beautiful pidgin English, profusely illustrated with pictures. But whenever we asked the Fathers for a copy they smilingly refused, explaining that they did not like this Bible to leave the country, knowing full well the chuckles it would cause in countries of more advanced civilization.

### SING-SING

While waiting for the loading to be completed we went to watch a "sing-sing" in the neighborhood. The occasion was some tribal festival. There were dancing, plays, and feasts of fruit and roast pig which smolder for days under hot stones wrapped in banana leaves. Long before we reached the village we could hear the tom-toms beating. As we approached, one group was dancing, stamping the ground monotonously and at the same time singing a strange melody, rising and falling and consisting only of a few notes. The others sat round and beat out the time of the dance on tom-toms with the palms of their hands. The natives had painted their black bodies with light clay and a design of small white circles. They wore beautiful grass skirts which moved up and down in time with the rhythm. Round their necks they wore long strings of dogs' teeth and beads, some with plaques of fish bones in front. The most fantastic

head ornaments were those decorated with golden birds of paradise and gray-blue wood pigeon tails. The sun was high, the heat almost unbearable. But the Kanakas did not feel it. They thought of their faraway native villages, almost forgotten after years of working for the white men.

The tom-toms were still beating, the strange song going on and on, when we finally left for the beach and the soothing shadow of the tall coconut palms. With the setting sun a cool breeze came up. We looked out to the blue sea rolling in great waves against the beach, while now and then the tom-tom grew louder, stopped suddenly, then slowly started again with the same rhythm. Strange country under the tropical sun.

#### OLD MAC THE RECRUITER

The sun was almost touching the summit of the hills behind the mission when the loading was finished. The Captain was in a hurry to get clear of the lagoon and the outer reefs before darkness fell and navigation became dangerous. The crew had already loosened one of the ropes from the palm tree which served as a mooring when a loud voice called out: "Hey there, wait for us!" and a small sinewy white man came running along, twelve bush Kanakas in his wake. They wanted to be taken to Salamaua. It was "Old Mac," the recruiter, prospector, adventurer, and all the other things one could be around here. We had heard a lot of gossip about him but never met him as his work kept him in the bush.

The plantations and mining companies place their orders for native labor with professional recruiters. On expeditions through the interior, often lasting several weeks, the recruiter goes from village to village. Against the payment of trade goods he obtains from the *Tul Tuls* (village chiefs) the right to take along with him to the coast a few of the young men of the village. On arrival at a government station on the coast, the string of fifty, sixty, or even a hundred natives

thus collected is inspected by a medical officer. If found fit the natives may be signed on for a labor contract, usually for a period of three years.

#### INDENTURED LABOR

A native gets from six to twelve shillings a month, half of which is paid in cash while the balance must be paid in one sum at the end of the term. In addition to this the requirements of the native have to be supplied by the employer in accordance with government regulations. Among these requirements are a box of matches per week, tobacco, old newspapers (which they cannot read but appreciate as "paper belong smoke," valued higher than the best French cigarette paper), a spoon, a rice bowl, a wooden box for his belongings, a certain quantity of rice and corned beef or canned fish per week, a woollen blanket, and his *lap lap* which consists of a yard and a half of cheap cotton cloth per month.

For a signed-on native the recruiter gets between Australian £8 and £10 per head delivered at the plantation, the price depending on the distance between the plantation and the center of recruiting and the rules of demand and supply. When his contract is up the native has to be sent back to his village at the expense of his employer, unless, as is often the case, he is willing to make a new contract for another two or three years.

This system of indentured labor, under which some thirty to forty thousand *koon*s are working, has its drawbacks. For the duration of the contract the best young men of the tribes have to live away from their womenfolk. This not only raises a number of moral problems on the plantations but may even in the long run endanger the propagation of the whole tribe. For this reason the government from time to time closes certain areas for recruiting. The same measure may also be taken by the government if in a certain area recruiters have been attacked or, as happens now and again, even killed by the natives. No white men except government patrols with



a native police troop may then enter these areas.

Old Mac found his business quite profitable, better than copra planting. But not everybody would like it. His "laborers" were gruesome-looking creatures, with long sticks piercing their nostrils, dressed only in a scanty grass skirt and adorned by woven bracelets. They were dirty and looked undernourished. Before being able to do any plantation work they would have to be properly fed for about six months. It was amazing to compare them with those of their brothers who had spent several years on a plantation or one of the large mission stations. But the Captain was glad to earn some extra fares by having a few more deck passengers, and we all knew we could count on Mac for an interesting evening.

"Half speed astern" we slowly steamed out, turning between the reef and the shore. The water was almost three hundred feet deep here, but so clear that one could see every pebble on the bottom and strange-looking fish darting about. As we passed the last small islands covered with wild coconut palms, the sun set, and darkness fell at once. The moon rose, flooding the coast with an unreal light. The Southern Cross was directly ahead of us as we slowly steamed out.

### GOLD

We all met again near the Captain's cabin on deck and after a few bottles of beer old Mac began talking about his last trip. He spoke about the growing difficulties in finding natives willing to work, about gold, and his experiences of long ago when the fields were first explored. Although we had had plenty of adventure ourselves, we found his tales fascinating.

Well before the outbreak of the Great War the German Government was fully informed concerning the gold deposits in the interior. However, the mountain ranges running parallel to the coast made it seem more than doubtful whether it would ever become profitable to work the deposits. It took ten days to

a fortnight to cross these heights and valleys through dense bush and unfriendly native tribes, with an expedition of Kanakas carrying mining equipment as well as food requirements for several weeks. Nevertheless prospecting was started. Together with other Australian gold miners Mac was engaged by the Germans to prospect in this territory. But the Great War soon put an end to their endeavors.

After the war the colony came under Australian administration as a mandate of the League of Nations. Mac and his friends started out again on their own initiative. But for years they hardly washed enough gold to pay for their expenses and the food of their native workmen, which they had to bring from the coast to Mount Kaindy, where the existence of gold was suspected. There appeared to be almost no hope of striking large deposits, and in the end the old reports were believed to have been faked, till one day came the great turning-point. This is how Mac told it:

### "THE BIG SIX"

Six of Mac's friends had pooled all their belongings in order to finance their adventure, as expenses were too high for a single prospector, but even their joint efforts seemed to be in vain. Disappointed, on the verge of starvation, and without any further means, they finally decided to return to the coast. It was on the last day before setting out on their long way back to the coast. One of them, to have a last look at the vast mountains that had promised so much and held so little, climbed up one of the hills. So exhausted was he that he could hardly manage to reach the top. Here and there he held on to a root or tuft of grass, when suddenly one of them gave way and he fell. As he was picking himself up with aching bones he saw, where the root had been torn out and had bared the rock, pure gold glittering in the last rays of the sun creeping over Mount Kaindy. Within his reach lay nuggets bigger than he had ever found or even seen. Forgetting all weariness he called ex-

citedly to his pals, and in the fading light they collected the treasure which had revealed itself in this strange way. They had stumbled on one of the richest deposits ever to be discovered.

Rumors about the "Big Six" soon spread. More prospectors came into this area. Some of them became rich, but most of them struggled without success, for the difficulties of traveling into the interior still remained. The road which the government planned to build has not materialized to this day.

Inspired by an unending supply of beer, Mac went on for hours spinning his yarn of how the "Big Six" spent their immense fortunes. He painted colorful pictures of the beauty of the interior, where birds of paradise play in the morning sun and wood pigeons softly call to one another.

Tonight Mac was just as poor as when he started to look for gold. His search for it may have been fascinating enough at the time, but he as well as others could not hold out against the large companies. For it soon became evident that, except for a few lucky spots, small-scale hand-sluicing by individual miners could hardly pay, whereas the ground was rich enough to be worked by dredges and other machinery.

### *FLIGHT TO GOLD*

The development of the gold fields on a large scale did not begin until the late twenties, when one of the big companies brought German Junkers planes into the territory. It now became possible to fly to the gold fields from the coast in a mere forty minutes. These planes made it possible to bring in sufficient supplies, and they were sturdy enough to withstand the torrential tropical rains and to remain on the field without the protection of a hangar.

We had frequently flown from Salamaua to Wau, the center of the Morobe gold fields. The first time had been in 1933. By then several new aviation companies had been founded, and their keen competition had resulted in reducing the freight rate from one shilling to fourpence per pound for

ordinary goods and threepence for rice. The amount of freight increased every day and the flights showed a good profit even at these reduced charges. On the other hand it did not contribute to the comfort of the flight for passengers.

The planes were as a rule loaded to capacity with rice. All the seats had been taken out, but nobody seemed to mind and we gladly paid £5 for what was aptly called a passage and not a seat to Wau. We would be able to make up for this high price on the return trip, for then we would be charged only £1.10. Space is scarce on the way up to the gold fields, since every single thing has to be brought up by plane, but there is ample room on the way back, as there is hardly ever any cargo for the coast.

Sitting on a fat bag of rice we looked down on forests and nothing but forests covering every hill and valley, like huge waves of a green sea. To build a motor road through this country must cost millions, and one can easily understand the fact that, here in one of the world's remotest places, the world's record has been established for air-borne freight counted in tons per mile of air route.

### *THEY HAVE GOLD— NOW THEY WANT OIL*

The airfield of Wau is notorious for its slope. All planes have to land here uphill and take off downhill, regardless of the direction of the wind. Nevertheless there have been no accidents, and the Australian pilots consider landing here mere child's play after the handkerchief fields further in the interior with much steeper slopes.

At Wau everything costs exactly twice as much as at the coast—the hotel, the drinks, the food—but nobody cares. The gold pays for it. Trucks run on the rough motor roads of the small settlement that has quickly developed 3,500 feet up in the mountains. Wherever there are Australians, there must be horse-racing. So race horses were also flown up—one more chance to spend the gold!



Another plane takes one from Wau to Bulolo, the seat of a large gold-mining company. Flying along the Bulolo river the country below looks like a well-plowed field, with the long ridges made by the dredges showing up plainly. The huge dredges, all of which were brought up in sections (the heaviest pieces weighing four tons) form a most impressive sight. They were specially constructed to be transported by air. Here in the wilderness is to be found a most efficient and up-to-date gold-washing plant. In spite of high transportation charges, it works so profitably that even now the gold is still only washed out by water. The mining company does not bother to treat the tailings by a chemical process, which has to be done in poorer districts in order to make it worth while. The total annual production of the Morobe fields rose from Australian £190,000 in 1929 to over £2,000,000 in 1937.

Having found gold, the people of New Guinea started to look for oil. The Oil Search Ltd., an Australian concern, began systematic oil prospecting in Papua in 1936 and in the Mandated Territory of New Guinea in 1938. The work was carried out on a large scale, with money apparently no object. The whole territory of Papua, for example, was re-charted by aerophotography for this purpose. In view of the fact that this charting can only be done on clear days and with the sun at a certain angle, this is rather a costly undertaking. No results had been achieved by 1939, but prospecting was carried on in high hopes.

### *LET'S MOVE THE CAPITAL*

The whole aspect of New Guinea has been changed by the gold fields, and for many years the demand has been made that the seat of administration be transferred from Rabaul, on the island of New Britain, to the mainland of New Guinea. Wau offered an excellent climate but was difficult of access, being situated in the mountains; Salamaua offered no space for civic development, and its harbor was

limited in its capacity; Madang further north was considered too far away from the gold fields; Lae, next to Salamaua the main port, had only a few houses and did not look very attractive in comparison with the old settlement of Rabaul with its Mango Avenue and Malaguna Road. In the end nobody seemed particularly keen to leave Rabaul, and the government stayed where it was, in the old center laid out by the Germans, which offered such an attractive view with its large harbor, green gardens, and the high mountains embracing the town.

Discussing the best location for the capital was one of the favorite pastimes of New Guineans. The subject came up that night with Mac. Some ardently defended Rabaul, others attacked it. The chief argument of those in favor of moving the capital was, of course, its present location near dangerous volcanoes.

Rabaul harbor is actually nothing but the drowned crater of a prehistoric volcano of enormous size, one part of whose wall has caved in to form the entrance to the harbor. The remainder of this crater wall is a semi-circle forming a narrow peninsula, on the inside of which, almost at its tip, is situated the town of Rabaul. It is overshadowed by the Mother and Two Daughters, three extinct volcanoes. Some two miles away from Rabaul, a comparatively small volcano, Matupi, is still active and emits sulphur fumes.

Once a conversation had reached this point, there would always be someone who insisted on relating his experiences on May 29, 1937. This time it was a government official who was traveling with us to inspect the copra before shipment and to look after the welfare of native laborers.

### *THE BIRTH OF THE BASTARD*

"It was a pleasant and sunny Saturday afternoon," he said, "about four o'clock, just when the usual week-end games of cricket, baseball, and tennis were about to begin. Suddenly our attention was distracted by the sight of wisps of steam which were begin-

ning to rise from the water near the harbor entrance. While we were watching we heard the first explosions of a new volcano erupting from the harbor bed, throwing solid rocks, stones, and hot pumice dust into the air, but no flowing lava. At first the wind blew the dust away from the town, but it changed very quickly, and before sunset the whole town, about three miles away, was completely in darkness and choked in dust. The dust settled all over the place in a layer eight or nine inches deep, and completely ruined the coconut plantations near by, as it decapitated the palms by its weight. In addition to the roar of the eruption and the earth tremors, there was incessant thunder and lightning and torrential rain. It was a terrible sight, such as I never hope to see again. And that was not all. On top of all this inferno, the Matupi crater also began to erupt the next day.

"The population of about a thousand whites and Chinese and several thousand natives was caught on the end of the peninsula as the eruption occurred near its base. Luckily on Sunday they could be picked up by some liners which had been summoned by wireless. They were taken to the Catholic mission some twenty miles away. It was amazing with what efficiency and speed the mission organized the care of this unexpected influx of several thousand people.

"By Monday everything was over and things were quiet again. But we Rabaulites had to get used to the sight of a new mountain at our doorstep, which had, within forty-eight hours, risen from the water to a height of some six hundred feet and had a diameter of three to six miles. With all this going on right next to Mother and Daughters, the landmarks of Rabaul, while Father and Son, another group of volcanoes, are way down the west coast of New Britain, what else could we do but call this new and troublesome child the 'Bastard'?

"Some five hundred natives, poor devils, were caught right at the point of the eruption, but otherwise no lives were lost. Except for broken-down

trees and thousands of tons of dust all over everything, very little serious damage had been caused in Rabaul itself, and normal life was soon resumed. For several months the harbor remained choked with a layer of floating pumice dust a foot deep, until this too gradually disappeared with the change of the trade winds.

"The tropics with their unquenchable power of rejuvenation restored Rabaul's beautiful dark-green setting within a few weeks, and within a year the thirty-year old mango and casuarina trees in its streets once again gave shade and full protection from the blazing sun. So why should we move the capital to some other place?"

### *TROPICAL FADE-OUT*

Well, there were a few things to be said in answer to that, and we said them.

(Since then we have read in the papers that on June 6, 1941, Matupi started to erupt again, producing dust fumes and seriously menacing the health of the residents of Rabaul. Early in September Canberra announced that the government had decided to abandon the town as the capital of the Mandated Territory. Lae, eighteen miles northwest of Salamaua, was to be made the new capital.)

Next we discussed the position of New Guinea in the defense system of Australia. We agreed that its importance should not be overestimated; it would always be a difficult job to defend this vast and sparsely populated area with its innumerable islands and its long shore lines.

It was past midnight when the conversation died away. We stood at the rail for a while in the warm night air to have one more look at the faraway hills and the chain of breakers glistening in the moonlight.

It seemed as if the breeze were carrying the sound of tom-toms to us across the waves. But perhaps we were imagining things, or perhaps we had, like so many others who had lived in New Guinea before us, the beat of tom-toms in our blood.